

Minutes

Economic Development Advisory Board

January 3, 2022 7:00PM
Held remotely via Zoom

Committee members (in attendance noted by Y/N):

Anne Meyers, Co-Chair	Y	Derrick Choi	Y	Carol Levin	Y	Marilyn Newman	Y
Paul Saner, Co-Chair	Y	Alan Christ	Y	Ken Lewis	Y	Al Raine	Y
Cliff Brown	Y	Sandi Silk	Y	Tom Nally	Y		

Staff & consultants present: Meredith Mooney, Sophie Robison, Caitlin Starr (Assistant Director of DICR)

Guests included: Debbie Miller, David Gladstone, Lesley Harkins. One anonymous call-in user.

Meeting materials included: [Agenda](#), [Brookline Diverse and Inclusive Business Directory](#)

Anne Meyers opened the meeting remotely via Zoom due to COVID, ensured all members were able to participate with audio and video, and announced the meeting would be recorded.

Chamber Presentation on ARPA

Paul Saner provided context for the ARPA process. Meredith Mooney provided an update on the Economic Development Department’s progress towards applying formally for ARPA funds, noting that staff will come back to EDAB later for a formal review of the Town’s intended ARPA requests.

Anne Meyers introduced David Gladstone and Debbie Miller from the Brookline Chamber. They discussed the Chamber’s work to build resiliency for Brookline’s small businesses in response to COVID, all done without any Town funding. The Chamber discussed the perceived challenges and opportunities to local restaurants that the Chamber can help with. Debbie reviewed the various options that the Chamber is considering in their ARPA application to draw more customers to Brookline, and to expand the “Discover Brookline” program.

Comments from the Board

The Board discussed ways to think about Brookline’s anchor landmarks and how they can be further integrated into Discover Brookline, as well as the Coolidge Theater. There were questions about how the “Draw More Customers to Brookline” effort of the Chamber work in concert with the Local Rapid Recovery Plan. The Board asked how the Chamber would prioritize their projects, and how the Federal Government might review/rank these programs. The Chamber noted that their top priority would be restaurant recovery support.

Some more specific topics discussed were around the actual number of “local” restaurants in Brookline (over 150 from the Town’s Storefront Survey). The Chamber will keep EDAB updated as their work progresses.

2021 Brookline Storefront Survey

Meredith Mooney reviewed the newly published 2021 Brookline Storefront Survey, which will be presented to the Select Board in the context of the Local Rapid Recovery Plan at the next Select Board meeting. In 2020, the Town's vacancy rate increased to 11.9%, not a rate previously seen in Brookline, and in 2021 is now at 12.5%. The Storefront Survey shows vacancy by neighborhood, as well. Meredith noted that new vacancies are highest in Coolidge Corner, then in Brookline Village. Meredith shared her observations on trends that emerge from the Storefront Survey.

Comments from the Board

After a presentation by Meredith Mooney, the Board discussed the changes in vacancy from 2020 to 2021, and what might have sheltered Brookline from greater vacancy in 2021. There was also discussion of changes in Asian businesses in Brookline. The Committee thought about ways to use this data, and how to channel it into potential expansion of "pop-up business" programs and increase the diversity of business owners.

There was also discussion about trends to avoid that might be informed by this data, including "ghost kitchens" and delivery only businesses.

Diverse and Inclusive Business Directory

Caitlin Starr is the Assistant Director of the Town's DICR, and she presented on what the Directory is and described how it works.

The Diverse and Inclusive Business Directory is a public resource that will highlight Diverse Business Enterprises as well as inclusive and accessible independent businesses and organizations here in Brookline. To date there are 35 entities that have submitted to the Directory. The Directory will serve as a marketing and networking tool for businesses, and will help the Town of Brookline better align and develop programs and resources to meet the needs to Brookline's diverse businesses.

Caitlin shared information about how to complete the Submission Form.

Comments from the Board

The Committee asked questions about how the Directory is accessed and updated, and how it will be distributed/shared. Caitlin noted that in 2023, there will be stickers provided to those businesses that participate in the Directory.

Comments from the Public

David Gladstone, Chamber President, noted his appreciation for the existence of this Directory.

Staff and Committee Member Updates

- Meredith shared information about two upcoming Virtual Town Halls on the restaurant vaccine card requirement. There's also a special Transportation Board meeting on January 12th about the Washington Street Complete Streets project.
- Ken Lewis updated the Committee on the US Open, including a plan for a vendor showcase, and a banner design competition.
- Tom Nally updated the Committee on the Boylston Street Corridor Study Committee, including the onboarding of a consultant to look at economic feasibility of redevelopment of specific sites and how this might inform a potential rezoning process. There's also an intern onboard preparing some 3D views of the Committee's ideas.

- Paul Saner discussed the 10 Brookline Place Committee and said that the next meeting, on February 2nd, will include a presentation by Bulfinch on their vision for the site.
- Derrick Choi and Sandi Silk discussed progress towards developing a Roundtable Discussion on economic development topics, especially with regards to the upcoming Comprehensive Planning effort in Brookline. Communities suggested considering Portland, Maine; Northampton, Maine; Portsmouth, NH; Lincoln Park, Chicago; Arlington, VA.
- Paul Saner provided an update on the Economic Development Director position, and that the annual election of Board Chairs will take place at the February 2022 EDAB meeting.

Closing

The next meeting will take place on February 7, 2022.

**Meeting adjourned at approximately 8:38 pm.